

About Rainforest Food

Apart from being an invaluable source of medicines, rainforests offer a veritable bounty of foods. Of an estimated 75,000 edible plants found in nature, only 150 enter world commerce and only 20, (mostly domesticated cereals), stand between human society and starvation. This means that modern agriculture is vulnerable to pests, disease and changes in climate.

Genes from wild plants are used to fortify modern varieties, and are likely to become increasingly important for this purpose.

Every modern rice plant contains a gene resistant to grassy stunt virus, a major rice disease. The gene was discovered 25 years ago in just two seeds from Indian forests. No other seeds containing the resistant gene were ever found again.

Crops originating in the rainforests include rice, quinine, rubber, coffee, bananas, eggplants, lemons, oranges, tea, cacao, cashews, cassava, tapioca, peanuts, pineapples, guavas, brazil nuts, paw paws, avocados and many more.

www.rainforestinfo.org.au



You could be forgiven for thinking Lemon Myrtle is a new discovery or a hybrid. But in fact this Australian sub-tropical rainforest plant, *Backhousia citriodora*, is enjoying a renaissance. The potential for Lemon Myrtle as a commercial crop was first identified in the 1880s. Lemon Myrtle was first grown commercially in Australia during WWII, when there was a lemon shortage. *Northern Rivers Echo June 2009*

REFERENCES EDIBLE RAINFOREST PLANTS

Australian Rainforest Plants, Vols 1-6, by Nan and Hugh Nicholson. These books have wonderful photos of all the plants mentioned here, and many more.

Wild Food Plants of Australia by Tim Low, Angus & Robertson, 1988. Reliable guide to native edible flora, making identification easy. Illustrated with colour photographs and line drawings. Guide to poisonous and non-poisonous plants.

Bush Tucker: Australia's Wild Food Harvest by Tim Low, Angus & Robertsons, 1989 Has a wealth of superb full-colour photographs. History of uses of bush foods and info of how they can be prepared.

Grow Your Own Bushfood by Keith & Irene Smith of Earth Garden Magazine. Very practical hands on advice and information.

Wild Food In Australia by A.B. & J.W. Cribb, Collins Sydney, 1976. A comprehensive guide to the edible plants of Australia. It tells where each plant can be found, how it can be identified and how it is prepared for eating.

Produced by

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Edible Rainforest Plants

for the Home Garden



For tens of thousands of years the indigenous people of Australia lived well off the land. Rainforest contains a great variety of edible plants many of which can be grown successfully in the home garden.



Choose your plants carefully, situate in appropriate sites and, with moderate amount of care, you can have your own little bit of rainforest

Some Edible Rainforest Plants Suitable for the Home Garden

***Alpinia caerulea* Native Ginger**

The numerous, 1.5cm blue berries contain a mass of hard seeds surrounded by a thin layer of sweetish and slightly spicy flesh, which can be chewed. The leaves have been used to wrap fish and meats for roasting or steaming and impart a subtle ginger flavour. The roots are insipid. It is quite hardy once established but prefers partial shade, rich organic soils and good moisture.

***Backhousia citriodora* Lemon Myrtle**

The highly fragrant leaves of the Lemon Myrtle are farmed commercially for use as a lemon flavouring and scent in a range of drinks, confectionary, foods and soaps. It is a hardy, shrub, which does well in full sun and tolerates heavy pruning.

***Citrus australasica* Finger Lime**

The Finger Lime is a prickly shrub growing to about 3 metres. The 4 to 8 cm long, cylindrical fruit can be green, yellow, black or, (in the variety *sanguinea*) blood red in colour. The juice is contained in globular sacs, which can be sprinkled over foods as a uniquely flavoursome and attractive garnish.

***Davidsonia jerseyana* Davidson's Plum**

The 3-4 cm long, deep purple fruits that form directly on the main stems of this unusual and decorative small tree are very sour but make a sublime plum jam. It can grow to > 6 metres but with pruning can be kept smaller. It needs protection from frost and extreme heat when young but is hardy once established. It is a threatened species.

***Dianella caerulea* Flax Lily**

This grass-like tufting plant is a beautiful addition to a rock garden or as an edging plant. It grows up to 1.5 metres high and wide and produces shiny purple edible berries in summer that are much loved by birds. It looks best if well watered and well mulched but will withstand harsher conditions.

***Eupomatia laurina* Bolwarra**

This shrub or small tree grows as a clump with zigzag, arching branches and glossy deep green foliage. It eventually grows to ca. 6 metres but can be kept smaller. It does best in partial shade with some moisture. The 1.5 to 2.5 cm, cup shaped berries are full of seeds surrounded by sweet, edible pulp. It is an ancient, primitive plant.

***Ficus coronata* Creek Sandpaper Fig**

In the wild the Creek Sandpaper Fig can grow to 15 m but in the garden it can be grown as a shrub to 5m. The 1.5 to 2 cm deep purple figs are sweet and juicy, though the quality is variable. This is a very hardy, fast growing, low maintenance plant which will tolerate full sun. It does best in soils rich in organic matter with adequate moisture.

***Hicksbeachia pinnatifolia* Red Bopple Nut**

The Red Bopple Nut is an attractive, small, slender tree with striking, deeply lobed prickly foliage. It produces long racemes of small purple flowers, which develop into bright red nuts each containing one edible seed about the size and shape of an almond. The seeds are



***Backhousia citriodora* Lemon Myrtle**

somewhat hard and less oily than a macadamia nut. It is an endangered plant.

***Syzygium* ssp. Lillypillies**

There are several species of Lillypilly, which produce attractive, edible fruits though many are insipid or somewhat astringent.

Riberry or *Syzygium leuhmannii* is a highly ornamental tree with a weeping habit and bright pink new growth. It bears numerous edible, small magenta berries. It is adaptable to full sun or semi-shade. Though it eventually can grow to a very large tree it can be pruned heavily.

The **Brush Cherry** or *Syzygium australe* bears numerous 1.5 to 2.5 cm juicy, pink to red fruits. Ripe fruit can be found nearly all year round but mainly in summer and autumn. It is a hardy, small to medium sized tree which tolerates heavy pruning. Commercial varieties including dwarf and hedging types are widely available.